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SUCCESS STORY
No-Till Farming Saves Company Money

Environmentally friendly alternative brings higher yields with less labor

Photo: CNFA/ Greg Schwab

USAID volunteer Dr. Greg Schwab (left) spent time in Belarus training farm owner Vladimir Lukonin on implementing no-till farming techniques, which have since proven successful.

On Vladimir Lukonin's wheat farm in Belarus, no-till crops yielded 10 to 15 percent more than their conventionally planted counterparts.

Vladimir Lukonin, the owner of the Kholodon Agro Company, realized that he could improve the efficiency and profitability of his farm by implementing no-till farming. No-till is a method of growing crops without disturbing the soil by tilling it. However, he and his staff lacked the knowledge required to implement profitable no-till wheat production.

Recognizing an opportunity to improve his agricultural practices, Lukonin approached USAID seeking assistance in no-till production, and Dr. Greg Schwab, a University of Kentucky extension soil specialist, came to Belarus to train Kholodon's managers in no-till crop production as a volunteer.

From Schwab's training, Kholodon's farmers learned that no-till practices not only improve production efficiency, but also reduce soil erosion and increase soil quality. Farmers can obtain higher yields with fewer inputs using no-till technologies. At the end of his visit, Schwab helped the farm crew plant their first no-till field. During the winter, Kholodon Agro decided to purchase a no-till planter from Great Plains Manufacturing in Salina, Kansas. Using this drill and their new knowledge, Kholodon Agro planted more than 2,000 acres of no-till spring crops.

Schwab returned to Belarus later to check Kholodon's progress and to train other farmers in no-till production techniques. He was pleased to learn that the no-till crops planted the previous spring had gotten 10 to 15 percent higher yields than their conventionally planted counterparts, which could be attributed to moisture conservation enabled by the no-till system.

Kholodon was also able to save labor and fuel costs associated with soil tillage, leading to a very profitable production system. In fact, Lukonin and his managers are so pleased, that they plan to purchase a larger drill during the winter. His excitement about the agronomic and environmental benefits associated with no-till technology is spilling over to surrounding farm owners.

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